

# CHAPTER 7

## PARKS, RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE ELEMENT

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*"With the growth of a great metropolis here, the absence of parks will make living conditions less and less attractive, less and less wholesome. Insofar, therefore, as the people fail to show the understanding, courage and organizing ability necessary to grasp the present opportunity, the growth of the region will necessarily tend to choke itself."*

*Olmsted and Hall, Proposed Park  
Reservations for East Bay Cities, 1930*

### INTRODUCTION

#### Overview

Clark County adopted its first Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Plan in 1965, with updates in 1975, 1981, 1987 and 2000. Now, the plan is being updated again, in coordination with the Growth Management Act (GMA).

The Comprehensive Regional Park, Recreation, and Open Space Plan (Regional Parks Plan) and the Vancouver Urban Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan (Urban Parks Plan) are the county's blueprints for acquiring, developing and maintaining parks, trails, recreation facilities and open space, and to guide the provision of recreation services and programs. The Regional Parks Plan and the Urban Parks Plan are separately adopted plans required as part of the criteria for funding through the Washington State Interagency Committee for Outdoor Recreation. The goals and policies from each plan have been consolidated and incorporated into this plan. The Regional Parks Plan and the Urban Parks Plan are incorporated herein by reference.

One of the GMA's 13 primary goals is to "Encourage the retention of open space and development of recreational opportunities, to conserve fish and wildlife habitat, increase access to natural resource lands and water, and develop parks." In addition, the GMA requires that urban government services be provided only in urban areas. The GMA also identifies cities as the appropriate provider of urban services, and counties as providers of regional services. The Regional Parks Plan and Urban Parks Plan lay the groundwork for the park system by:

- Assessing public attitudes toward the acquisition, development and management of parks, open space and recreation facilities, and involving the general public in park, open space and recreation planning;
- Establishing acquisition and development standards for outdoor recreation facilities and grounds, including greenways, open space, trails, special facilities and neighborhood, community and regional parks;
- Establishing priorities for the acquisition and development of park, open space and recreation facilities, and the implementation of recreation programs, and incorporating these priorities into the county's capital facilities program;

- Planning for and developing a park and recreation system which serves the diverse recreational interests of the residents of Clark County and fosters an environmentally-sensitive approach toward preservation and enhancement of the county's valuable natural resources, such as fish and wildlife habitat, wetlands, and water quality;
- Identifying funding sources and other resources for acquisition, capital improvements, operation and maintenance programs and recreational activities;
- Considering cooperative "partnership" agreements with other governmental agencies and private and commercial interests in the area of park, open space and recreation planning and development; and,
- Providing the framework for the Parks & Recreation Advisory Commission and Board of County Commissioners to establish specific policies for the Parks and Recreation Department.

While the parks, recreation, and open space planning effort is focused within Clark County, the county recognizes the regional context of Clark, Cowlitz, and Skamania counties and the impact that major attractions, such as Mt. St. Helens, have on the communities of these neighboring counties. These major attractions provide economic and tourism benefits but creates transportation impacts from regional, national and international travelers.

This plan addresses issues related to other elements of the 20-Year Plan. For example, parks and open space may include lands useful for fish and wildlife habitat, public access to natural lands and water, and protection of critical areas. Likewise, other elements address issues related to parks, open space and recreation. For example, the Urban, Rural and Natural Resource Elements address area specific issues related to parks and open space. While these cross-references are both necessary and expected, every attempt has been made to construct a complete and thorough park, recreation, and open space plan that can be understood and used independently.

## **PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

As discussed below several methods were used to solicit public comment concerning the update of the Park, Recreation and Open Space Element of the plan.

### **Parks and Recreation Surveys**

Random-sample, telephone surveys were conducted for the Regional Parks Plan and the Urban Parks Plan; 400 and 600 residents, respectively, were surveyed. Ninety-two percent of those surveyed indicated that park and recreational services are either important or very important to the quality of life in Clark County. Recreation activities were ranked based on the level of participation: hiking or walking ranked highest for both individual and household participation. Other popular activities included picnicking, wildlife observation, camping and swimming. Purchasing land now to be set-aside for future park and recreation development was supported by eighty-five percent. With regard to urban park development, seventy-nine percent favored developing sites within five years of acquisition.

### **Parks & Recreation Advisory Commission**

The Parks & Recreation Advisory Commission, which meets monthly to discuss projects and to hear citizens' concerns and ideas, played a key role in developing policies and capital improvement priorities. The Parks & Recreation Advisory Commission reviews all major policy issues faced by the Parks and Recreation Department.

## **Past Planning Efforts**

### **1992 Clark County Trails & Bikeway System Plan**

The county-wide trails and bikeway plan was prepared under the guidance of and with input from a 15-member task force of private and public agencies and interested citizens. Task force membership included representatives from bicycle, walking, and equestrian clubs, and providers of trails on public lands, including the US Fish & Wildlife Service, US Forest Service, and Washington Departments of Fisheries, Wildlife, Transportation, and Natural Resources. Additional information was gathered during two series of public workshops.

### **1992 Clark County Open Space Commission Final Report**

The 14-member Clark County Open Space Commission was organized in November 1989 to prepare an open space plan for the county. Following three years of work, which included a citizen survey in June 1991, the commission issued its final report in August 1992. The commission's report has served as the primary guide in planning and acquiring the growing system of open space, greenways, and habitat areas throughout Clark County. The Clark County Open Space Commission Final Report is incorporated by reference.

### **1998 Clark County Sports Field Master Plan**

The Clark County Sports Field Master Plan was published in January 1997. It was developed under the guidance of two community-based committees. A 16-member citizen task force represented user groups. It was composed of representatives of baseball, softball, soccer, and football at the adult, teen, and youth levels. Invitations to participate were sent to 42 leagues. A 13-member administrative task force represented sport field providers. It included members from cities, schools, and the county.

### **Other Public Meetings**

Public meetings were held to address park, open space and recreation issues. The Parks and Recreation Department hosted five community meetings during spring 2000 to elicit input for the Regional Parks Plan. Additionally, fourteen meetings and a live, call-in CVTV discussion were hosted to gather input for the Urban Parks Plan in summer 2001.

### **2001 Open Space Commission**

In September 2001, an 18-member citizen advisory committee was formed to prepare an acquisition plan and consider the feasibility of utilizing the conservation REET as a funding source. The plan identifies a series of high priority areas throughout the county for expending conservation area funds should such funds become available.

# EXISTING PARK AND OPEN SPACE FACILITIES IN CLARK COUNTY

The Vancouver-Clark Parks and Recreation Department owns and manages approximately 6,875 acres of park and open space lands. These lands are divided into two categories: urban and regional facilities. Urban facilities include neighborhood parks, community parks and urban open space. Regional facilities include regional parks, conservation and greenway systems, trails and special facilities.

This section provides a summary of county parks and open space lands and recreational programs. (A complete inventory of county parks facilities is available from the Parks and Recreation Department.)

## Urban Facilities

Urban facilities include neighborhood parks, community parks and urban open spaces. The National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) suggests that a park system, at minimum, be composed of a core system of 6.25 to 10.5 acres per 1,000 persons of urban park land. Clark County owns and manages the following park system within the urban area (Table 7.1).

**Table 7.1 Clark County Urban Park System (Unincorporated area of VUGA only)**

TYPE OF PARK FACILITY	NUMBER OF FACILITIES	ACREAGE TOTAL
NEIGHBORHOOD	29	186.6 acres for neighborhood
COMMUNITY	12	315.7 acres for community
URBAN OPEN SPACE	10	81.6 acres
JOINT SCHOOL/PARK	18	103 acres

## Neighborhood Parks

Neighborhood parks are intended to serve residential areas within walking distance (1/3- to ½-mile radius) of the park site. The minimum size for a neighborhood park is three- to five-acres to accommodate typical facilities and activities. Neighborhood parks will not normally exceed 20 acres. Development typically includes landscaping, irrigation, play fields, pedestrian paths and trails, picnic tables, play equipment, and sports courts.



Park services at the neighborhood level are provided in several ways. Schools meet an important part of the neighborhood recreational need. Neighborhood parks complement and expand on the services provided by school grounds. In certain areas, neighborhood parks are located adjacent to schools or involve developing and upgrading the school site. Since access is mostly pedestrian and children between the ages of five and 12 constitute the primary user group, park sites should be located so that persons living within the service area will not have to cross a major arterial street to get to the site. Facilities for teenagers and adults may also be provided.

### **Community Parks**

Community parks serve groups of neighborhoods within a one- to five-mile radius of the park site. The minimum desirable size is 20 acres, although smaller sites may also be necessary because of their unique location or historic significance. Sites will not normally exceed 100 acres. Park services at the community level are provided in several ways. Junior and senior high schools meet an important part of the community recreational need. Community parks complement and expand on the services provided by school grounds. In certain areas, community parks are located adjacent to schools or involve developing and upgrading the school site. Access to community parks may be by car, bicycle or on foot. The range of facilities provided will be greater than in neighborhood parks and will generally appeal to more diverse user groups. Development typically includes landscaping, irrigation, picnic shelters and tables, tennis courts, covered activity areas, soccer and baseball fields, bike and pedestrian trails, restrooms and parking lots. Swimming pools and recreation centers may be located on these sites.

### **Urban Open Space**

Urban open space provides visual and psychological relief from man-made development in the urban area. Public access to these areas is important to provide passive recreational opportunities where it is compatible with resource protection. Where these greenspaces can be connected along stream corridors, they will provide valuable wildlife habitat and other ecological benefits. The site may or may not be improved, but can include trails, greenway corridors, and an area within a community or neighborhood park, which is left in its natural state.



Selection of urban green space sites is based on a variety of criteria, including linkage of other open spaces, schools or public facilities, the need for open space in an area, existing parks and open space in the area and preservation of natural resources.

## Urban Park Standards

The 20-Year Plan identifies a combined acquisition standard for neighborhood and community parks of five-acres per 1,000 population. The reason for a combined neighborhood/community standard is recognition that individual neighborhood and community park standards may not be attainable in certain areas because of existing and proposed development, which may eliminate the availability of parcels large enough to accommodate these parks. Within the combined five-acre standard, the preferred distribution is two-acres for neighborhood parks and three-acres for community parks. Urban open space has a separate standard of one-acre per 1,000 population.

### Neighborhood/Community Acquisition Standard

- 5 acres/1,000 population.

### Neighborhood/Community Development Standard

- All neighborhood and community parks to Level II development<sup>1</sup>

### Urban Open Space Acquisition Standard

- 1 acre/1,000 population

### Urban Open Space Development Standard

- Not Applicable

The national standard for neighborhood and community parks is 6.25 to 10.5 acres per 1,000 population. While the county has adopted a level-of-service standard of five-acres, it is the city's and the county's goal to achieve the national standard. These higher standards become more critical as densities within the urban area increase.

## County-wide Regional Facilities

NRPA suggests that a park system include 15 to 20 acres of regionally significant "adjunct" park facilities and additional special use and conservancy lands. The size and amount of "adjunct" park lands will vary from community to community, but must be taken into account when considering a total, well rounded system of parks and recreation areas. Clark County owns and manages approximately 5,007 acres of park and open space land that provide service to all county residents and these parks and open space lands include 8 regional parks totaling 1,640 acres, 7 special facilities totaling 416 acres, over 2,900 acres of conservation and greenway systems, and the 27-mile Lewis and Clark Railroad right-of-way. In addition, the county owns and manages the 333-acre Clark County Fairgrounds/Recreational campus (Figure 25).

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<sup>1</sup> Neighborhood park development in the unincorporated urban area will occur with annexation, incorporation, or establishment of special park district.



## Regional Parks

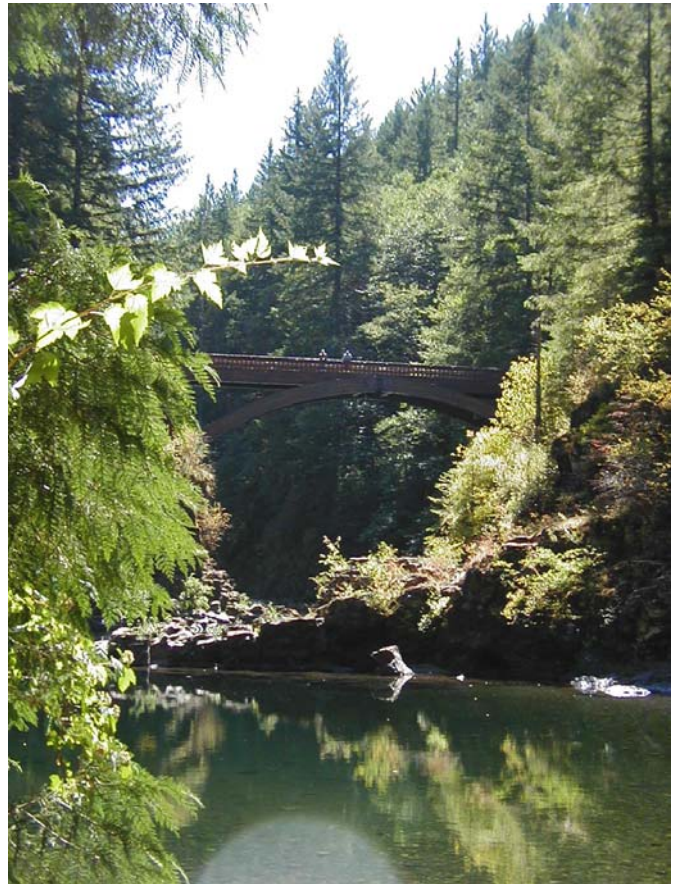
A regional park is an area with natural or man-made qualities for outdoor recreation, such as picnicking, boating, fishing, swimming, camping and trail uses. Play areas may also be included. It will typically serve several communities within one hour driving time, although closeness to population centers is desired. The desirable size is 200 acres or greater. If possible, the site should be contiguous to or encompass natural resource areas. These parks are typically located in areas with outstanding natural features or qualities. These natural features may define the boundaries of a regional park. Clark County's existing regional parks range in size from 100 to more than 325 acres.

## Regional Conservation and Greenway Systems

Regional Conservation and Greenway Systems are the "resource-based" open space land types identified in the Clark County Open Space Commission Final Report (August 1992) that the Open Space Commission Report identifies four categories of conservation, greenway, and open space lands. Each category includes lands that provide multiple benefits and high functional value.

- River systems and associated flood plains, which provide low-intensity recreation, natural vegetation, shore-lines, fisheries, and wildlife habitat (for example, the North and East Forks of the Lewis River, Lacamas Lake and Creek, Washougal River, Burnt Bridge Creek, and Salmon Creek);
- Columbia River lowlands, providing benefits similar to river systems and flood plains, but of a much larger scale than other county river systems;
- Cascade foothills, providing significant wildlife habitat and vegetation, sensitive water features, remote/low intensity recreation; and,
- Dispersed open space areas, which are site specific and combine resource, economic and urban-based areas.

Conservation and greenway systems may be managed for a variety of uses, depending on the attributes of the site. Potential uses include wildlife habitat, low impact access for wildlife viewing and environmental education, regional trails, and where appropriate, picnic areas, boat ramps, fishing areas and regional parks. Property-specific management plans are developed, as needed, when properties are proposed for inclusion in the system. The County Parks and Recreation Department coordinates development of management scenarios with the state and federal wildlife agencies.



## Regional Trails

The county has adopted a comprehensive Trails and Bikeway System Plan (September 1993) that identifies a county-wide trail system, including trails for biking, hiking and horseback riding, which is incorporated by reference. As defined in the plan, trails include any "path, route, way, right-of-way, or corridor posted, signed, or designated as open for non-motorized travel or passage by the general public." Trails serve all county residents. Five types of trails are identified in the plan:



- Regional multi-use trails, which provide the major access networks across the county for pedestrian and bicycle use, with equestrian use on the shoulder, where feasible.
- Local trails, whose function is to provide access from neighborhoods to regional multi-use trails or bike lanes.
- Rustic trails, which are smaller in scale than the local trail, and are intended to provide access to natural features and to provide loop trail opportunities.
- Semi-primitive trails, which are intended for rural or forest settings, where a more dispersed level of use provides for a more natural experience.
- Bike lanes and pedestrian walkways, which are located on city, county, and state road rights-of-way.

## Wildlife Habitat

Wildlife habitat is composed of land, water, vegetation, and other natural resources necessary to support fish and wildlife populations. Clark County has used several methods to map and/or designate its highest priority habitat and critical/sensitive lands (e.g., high-quality wetlands). These include the Clark County Open Space Commission Report, GMA critical lands designations, Washington State Priority Habitat and Species Program, Washington Conservation Commission Fish Distribution Maps and Limiting Factors Analyses, and Lower Columbia Steelhead Conservation Initiative. While these programs utilized different methodologies to identify high-priority wildlife habitat, the results produce similar or complementary findings and lead to consistent preservation priorities.

## Regional Special Facilities

Special facilities of regional significance are generally located and developed to serve one or several needs of the community for recreational, historical, cultural, environmental and educational activities. Regional special facilities range from active recreation areas such as sports field complexes and camping facilities to more passive activities such as scenic overlooks and botanical gardens. These facilities may be located within or in proximity to regional conservation and greenway areas, regional parks and/or regional trails, and may be provided by either public or private entities. There is no minimum standard or minimum size for a majority of regional special facilities however, the site must be large enough to accommodate the specific use.



## **Regional Park Standards**

Population-based standards for regional parks and special facilities and resource-based standards for conservation and greenway systems and trails are adopted as part of this Element.

There are no national standards for conservation and greenway systems and trails because they are based on the natural resources within a given community. NRPA guidelines state that a standard for these lands "must be part of a regional open space system plan and accompanying policies." Regional open space and trails plans have been prepared by the county and are incorporated into this 20-Year Plan.

### **Acquisition Goal**

- 20 acres/1,000 population

### **Acquisition Standard**

- 10 acres/1,000 population

### **Development Standard**

- 18% of site developed

### **Desired minimum size**

- 200 acres

Typically, greenways follow rivers, streams, creeks, ravines and other natural corridors; there is no standard or minimum size. Corridors should be of sufficient width to protect the resource. Corridors can be defined by either built or natural features, such as vegetation, bluff lines, water features, roads or other existing development.

### **Acquisition Standard**

- Resource-based; see attached map "Regional Park and Open Space Systems"

### **Development Standard**

- Not Applicable, but activities should be consistent with adopted management plans

The Plan also calls for trailheads with provisions for auto parking, consistent signage and interpretive markers and educational information. Public need and available funding shall guide acquisition and development (see Table 7.2). Standards for design construction are provided in the Trails and Bikeways System Plan. The county shall develop trails using the Trails and Bikeways System Plan and standards as a guide.

### **Acquisition Standard**

- Not Applicable

### **Development Standard**

- Guidelines provided in Trails Plan

**Table 7.2 Clark County Regional Park System**

Regional Parks	Current Acres	Current Deficit	Relative to Standard
Acquisition	2,300	1,070	7.75ac/1000
Development	417	190	12.4% developed

*\*\*Based on 2000 park inventory*

## OTHER AGENCY FACILITIES

Federal, state, and other local agencies own and manage park, recreation and open space lands as well. Table 7.3 provides a summary of these lands and ownership. (A more detailed description is provided in the Regional Park, Recreation, and Open Space Plan.)

**Table 7.3 Summary of Federal, State and Local Agency Park and Open Space Land within Clark County**

JURISDICTION / AGENCY	ACREAGE
USDA FOREST SERVICE	1,180
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE	209
US FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE	6,123
WASHINGTON DEPT. OF FISH AND WILDLIFE	2,815
WASHINGTON DEPT. OF NATIONAL RESOURCES	60,000
WASHINGTON STATE PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION	1,044
VANCOUVER-CLARK PARKS & RECREATION	5,007
CITY OF CAMAS	192
CITY OF WASHOUGAL	78
CITY OF BATTLE GROUND	18
CITY OF RIDGEFIELD	38
TOWN OF LA CENTER	12
TOWN OF YACOLT	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>76,717</b>

*Source: Vancouver/Clark County Parks and Recreation Department*

## School Districts

There are eleven public school districts in Clark County. These schools provide a variety of recreational facilities, including tennis courts, soccer, baseball and football fields, tracks, basketball courts, and children's play equipment. Residents frequently use school facilities. Some school properties have developed parks on or adjoining the school site by

the county with an agreement between the county and school district concerning the use of the facilities.

### **Private Facilities**

Private recreational facilities exist throughout Clark County. The private facilities provide for a wide range of recreational activities generally on a fee basis. The private recreation industry influences recreation planning by providing much needed facilities, thereby easing the burden on public recreational facilities. Individual special facilities are listed in the inventory of regional special facilities (see the Regional Park, Recreation, and Open Space Plan). Of note, one of the largest private landholders in Clark County is Pacific Power and Light (PP&L). Much of their landholdings are along the North Fork Lewis River reservoirs, where there are numerous recreational opportunities, some which have been developed by PP&L.

## **FUTURE PARK AND OPEN SPACE FACILITIES IN CLARK COUNTY**

Future park need was determined through a systematic examination of community needs for each category of park facility. This section presents the method used to assess the demand and need for each category of park.

### **Demand and Need**

This section provides a general description of the analysis of demand and need for urban and regional parks. The Regional Parks Plan and the Urban Parks Plan provide the inventory, needs assessment, and project lists for the Vancouver urban area park districts and for regional parks. The six-year capital facilities list is in Section VI of this plan.

A multi-step process was used to assess demand and need for each type of park and recreational facility in Clark County. The methodology for determining demands and need varied by facility type, and the methodologies are described below. Generally, county park standards were matched against existing inventories of park land and service area populations. Park properties and facilities managed by other agencies, where appropriate, were taken into consideration. For example, the Ridgefield Wildlife Refuge properties are included in the inventory of conservation and greenway systems, and Battle Ground Lake State Park is included in the inventory of regional park property.

### **Urban Parks, Recreation, and Open Space**

Urban park, recreation, and open space planning distinguishes between urban park needs in the Vancouver urban area and the needs of the other cities in the county. This distinction is made because the Vancouver urban area is the only urban area in the county where there is an existing unincorporated urban park need. In addition, the county currently owns and manages urban parks in the Vancouver urban unincorporated area, but not in the urban unincorporated area of any other city. Ultimately, the county will not provide urban parks within urban areas. Separate analysis and policies for Vancouver and the other cities are needed before the county will be able to transition the Vancouver urban park system to the City of Vancouver.

### **Vancouver Urban Area**

For planning purposes, the Vancouver urban area has been divided into ten park districts. For each of these districts, a detailed process was used to assess demand and

need and to develop the 20-Year Plan and the 6-year Capital Facilities Plan. First, district maps were prepared that identified zoning, water features, park inventory, drainage inventory, schools, trails, arterials, parcels, environmentally sensitive areas, priority wildlife habitat and vacant lands. Secondly, the existing and projected need for each district was calculated by comparing the existing inventory to park standards. Next, a detailed analysis of each district was conducted to determine potential park sites that could meet existing and projected needs. District acquisition priorities were prepared based on public input, and draft maps were prepared showing district priorities. The Urban Parks Plan and Section VI of this plan describe the 20-year and 6-year demand and need for each of these park districts, respectively.

## **Other Cities and Towns**

The county will have a more limited role in planning for the unincorporated areas around Battle Ground, Camas, La Center, Ridgefield, Washougal and Yacolt. Parks districts have not been created in these urban growth areas, but each of the cities is undertaking parks planning efforts to ensure that urban park needs are met. Consistent with the GMA directive that urban parks are provided by cities, Clark County will work with but defer to the cities to ensure that their park needs are met according to their park plans.

## **Regional Parks, Recreation, and Open Space**

### **Regional Parks**

A detailed process was used to assess the county's regional park needs. First, an inventory of existing regional parks and other agency facilities was conducted. This inventory is shown in the Regional Parks Plan. Using the 10 acre per 1,000 people standard, an existing deficit of approximately 190 acres of regional parks was identified. Next, potential park sites were selected through a public process of evaluating locations that meet NRPA definitions of regional park facilities. These potential locations were then evaluated on the basis of zoning, water features, park inventory, drainage inventory, schools, trails, arterials, parcels, environmentally sensitive areas, priority wildlife habitat, and vacant lands. The Regional Parks Plan describes the inventory, needs assessment, and project list, and Section VI of this plan describes the six year capital facilities needs and funding sources.

### **Regional Conservation and Greenway Systems**

Regional conservation and greenway systems are a resource-based category; as such, there is no population-based standard. The Regional Conservation and Greenway System is based on the county Open Space Commission's detailed evaluation of the need for additional open space. The Open Space Commission examined 5 methods for evaluating the need for additional open space in Clark County: population driven standards; resource driven standards (such as rate of depletion of a particular resource type); expert opinion; legislative and policy guidelines; and public opinion. A detailed description of this evaluation is contained in the Open Space Report.

The commission concluded that, with the exception of urban open space, there are not generally accepted population-based standards for determining open space need in Clark County. In the void of established standards, the commission elected to develop planning objectives that could be applied to Clark County and would, if implemented, create an adequate system of open spaces. A complete list of these planning objectives is found in the Open Space Commission Report.



## Regional Trails

As with conservation and greenway systems, trails are resource-based, not population-based. The county conducted a special trails study in 1992, which included an assessment of the need for trails. With input from the County Open Space Commission Report and with additional work sessions with the Parks & Recreation Advisory Commission and county staff, a network of interconnecting multi-use trails and bikeways was proposed throughout the county.

The trails are planned to utilize, where feasible, natural greenway corridors, open space and road networks, as well as portions of railroad and utility rights-of-way. The Trails Plan identifies goals for the miles of multi-use trails, local trails, bikeways, rustic, and semi-primitive trails. The Regional Parks Plan describes the inventory, needs assessment, and project list, and Section VI of this plan describes the six year capital facilities needs and funding sources.

## GOALS AND POLICIES

The Growth Management Act makes many references to the importance of parks, recreation and open space. Goal 9 of the Act states that local governments should:

*"Encourage the retention of open space and development of recreational opportunities, to conserve fish and wildlife habitat, increase access to natural resource lands and water, and develop parks".*

The Act calls for provision of greenbelts and open space areas within and between urban areas. Other provisions of the Act, such as those relating to the environment and public facilities and services, contain language that addresses park, recreation and open space issues.

This 20-Year Plan contains the goals and policies for parks, recreation and open space, which are compiled from the Regional Parks Plan and the Urban Parks Plan. These goals and policies are intended to guide the acquisition and development of park facilities and recreational programs, and to provide guidance to the county's development review process.

The county will continue to plan for urban parks, in cooperation with cities, in unincorporated urban areas. As a provider of county-wide regional services, Clark County will focus available resources on regional facilities and services that benefit all county residents regardless of location. The service standards, needs, policies and capital facility plans in this document reflect the county's shift from a provider of both urban and regional services to a provider of regional services only.

### 7.0 County-wide Planning Policies

7.0.1 The county and each municipality shall identify open space corridors, riparian areas, important isolated open space and recreational areas within and between urban growth areas, and should prepare a funding and acquisition program for this open space. Open space shall include lands useful for parks and recreation, fish and wildlife habitat, trails, public access to natural resource lands and water, and protection of critical areas.

## Urban Parks

**GOAL:** *Encourage cities to provide urban parks, open space, and recreational opportunities within urban growth areas, while ensuring that existing county-owned urban parks in unincorporated areas are properly managed and that future urban park opportunities, including greenbelt and open space areas, are preserved.*

### 7.1 Policies

#### Acquisition

- 7.1.1 The county's standard for urban parks shall be 6-acres per 1,000 people, with 5-acres per 1,000 people of neighborhood/community parks and 1-acre per 1,000 people of urban open space.
- 7.1.2 Within the Vancouver designated urban growth area, urban park services shall be limited to a level that reserves and makes available to the city sites for future development of neighborhood, community parks, and urban open space. Urban parks shall be acquired as consistent with the urban park standard.
- 7.1.3 The county shall identify open space corridors and areas, which shall include lands useful for parks and recreation, fish and wildlife habitat, trails, public access to natural resource lands and water, and protection of critical areas and water quality. Wherever possible, the natural terrain, drainage and vegetation of the community should be preserved with high quality examples contained within parks or greenbelts.
- 7.1.4 Within the other cities' unincorporated urban areas, where there are no existing county urban parks and where there is no current need for urban parks, the county shall not acquire urban parks. The county will actively negotiate contracts with each of the cities and towns to accept for it to accept the responsibility for acquisition of urban parks. When contracts are in place for urban park acquisition in the urban unincorporated area of the cities and towns, the county will collect and manage park impact fees and will make park impact fees available to the cities and towns for acquisition purposes.
- 7.1.5 Urban parks shall be acquired as identified on the city or town's 20-Year Plan as the "greatest need" for that urban area; the county will attempt to incorporate provisions from each city's or town's 20-Year Plan.
- 7.1.6 When cities or towns do not identify park needs in the unincorporated areas, the county should acquire community parks first. In urban areas where an adequate or suitable community park site is no longer available, or where areas are poorly served by a community park, the county shall:
  - Encourage the acquisition of neighborhood parks; and,
  - Consider modification of neighborhood park standards to compensate for the lack of a community park. Specifically, consideration shall be given to increasing site size and type of development of neighborhood parks to allow for increased recreation opportunities.
- 7.1.7 The Vancouver-Clark Parks and Recreation Department will review and accept donations to be sure they are consistent with urban park plans and standards,

and that they meet county criteria and guidelines for maintenance, safety, and long-term responsibilities.

- 7.1.8 The county will assist citizens to meet their urban park need through Local Park Improvement Districts established and managed by citizens.

### **Development and Maintenance**

- 7.1.9 The county will improve undeveloped neighborhood park sites in the Vancouver urban area to the "Greenspaces" level to provide a safe and secure site, which is compatible with the surrounding neighborhood. The county will develop community parks with a youth sports component. Further urban park development will rely on future annexations, incorporation, or the establishment of special park districts.
- 7.1.10 In the event the City of Vancouver or a local park improvement district wishes to develop a particular site to a greater degree and is willing to take responsibility for ongoing maintenance and operations, it shall be the policy of the county to allow such further development. Such development must be planned and approved jointly by county, city and park district.
- 7.1.11 Since the county will not be acquiring urban park sites within the unincorporated urban areas of the cities and towns except for Vancouver, the county will not develop, improve, or maintain urban parks in the urban unincorporated areas of these other cities and towns.

### **Regional Parks and Special Facilities**

**GOAL:** *Maximize the quality of life in Clark County by providing regional open space, trails, parks and recreational opportunities and facilities, and planning to acquire, restore, enhance, preserve, develop and manage these facilities and natural resources in such a manner as to afford the maximum benefit to the community.*

## **7.2 Policies**

### **Acquisition**

- 7.2.1 Preference shall be given to acquisitions, which meet one or more of the following:
- Adjacent to other public ownerships, when possible;
  - Contains unique natural features;
  - Contains features of cultural, archeological or historical significance;
  - Located near population centers;
  - Is a threatened resource;
  - Provides opportunity for joint funding, use, ownership and management;
  - Provides opportunity to take advantage of special conditions that arise (e.g., land donations); and
  - Is identified as a priority in the Parks, Trail, or Open Space Elements of the Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Plan.

- 7.2.2 The county shall acquire regional park sites, which are accessible to public transportation, when possible. If public transportation is not presently available, the county shall encourage initiation of public transportation to regional park sites.
- 7.2.3 Evaluate whether the a donation is identified as a priority in the Regional Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan, the Trail and Bikeway System Plan, the Open Space Commission Report, drainage and/or water quality plans, or other public plans, and if the proposed donation would further the goals of these plans.
- 7.2.4 Evaluate whether a donation to the county is the best method to protect the property. The availability and appropriateness of other government agencies or private organizations should be considered by conducting an assessment of overall costs and benefits of the proposed donation.
- 7.2.5 Regional special facilities should be provided that meet the greatest need within the county, according to national or adopted county standards, but shall not duplicate facilities where a public need has already been adequately met and made available at a reasonable price.
- 7.2.6 Within the special facilities category, the county should give higher consideration to special facilities that generate revenue to offset their own maintenance and operations. The county should design and manage special facilities to accommodate compatible multiple purposes and uses, when appropriate.
- 7.2.7 Coordinate with the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to ensure that DNR land management decisions provide maximum benefit for park, recreation and open space, as identified in the Regional Park, Recreation, and Open Space Plan.
- 7.2.8 A master plan should be developed for each regional park facility before the county commits to any major use of the site.

### **Development and Maintenance**

- 7.2.9 Clark County should acquire adequate land and resource base to provide for the public park experience with publicly owned land and resources. Adjacent to such publicly owned land, private property owners should maintain the right to permitted land uses, including timber production, agriculture, and mineral extraction.
- 7.2.10 Management of such publicly owned land should recognize adjacent resource land practices (agriculture, forest and mineral) and shall not interfere with the continued use in accordance with federal, state and local laws and industry best management practices, of these designated lands for the production of food, agricultural products, or timber, or for the extraction of minerals.
- 7.2.11 Overall planning and assessment of sports field needs in Clark County shall be provided, which will include an update of field inventories and evaluations every five years and a listing of priority improvements needed at each field site.
- 7.2.12 The county should join with cities, school districts, and local sports organizations in Clark County to develop a county-wide system of sports fields and sports field complexes to serve the baseball, softball, soccer, and football needs of youth and adults.



- 7.2.13 Clark County should assume primary responsibility for organizing a sports field council, provide county representation, and fund a one-year staff position of sports council coordinator.
- 7.2.14 Provide land and establish development standards and operating conditions for local sports groups to build, maintain, and operate their own fields.
- 7.2.15 Vancouver-Clark Parks & Recreation Department shall provide design and technical support for athletic field development by cities, school districts, and local sports organizations.
- 7.2.16 All regional facilities should be designed and developed through a public master planning process that considers:
- The standards and definitions in this plan;
  - Cost-efficient maintenance;
  - Resource protection;
  - User safety;
  - Sensitivity to adjacent land uses (including noise, traffic, lighting);
  - Compatible multiple purposes and uses, when appropriate; and,
  - Americans with Disabilities Act.
- 7.2.17 Establish and implement effective management practices for:
- Resource protection (wildlife, fisheries, habitat);
  - Quality recreational experience;
  - Public safety; and,
  - Cost efficiency.

## **Regional Conservation and Greenway Systems**

***GOAL: Encourage the retention of an open space system that provides parks and recreational opportunities, conserves fish and wildlife habitat, increases access to natural resource lands and provides other community benefits as identified in the Clark County Open Space Commission Report.***

### **7.3 Policies**

- 7.3.1 The Clark County Open Space Commission Report should guide the county in meeting the county's goals for regional conservation and greenway systems.
- 7.3.2 The Open Space Commission's 13 general planning objectives should guide the Planning Division in evaluating development proposals and the Parks and Recreation Department in evaluating the need and application of the open space categories identified. Those objectives are:
- Clark County should consider acquiring open space lands where there is a high probability of loss or conversion before acquiring open space lands where there is a low probability of loss or conversion. This should take into consideration both actual development and property division and ownership patterns.

- Clark County should give added consideration to open space lands which enhance the value of other protected abutting or neighboring parks, forests, wildlife preserves, natural areas, or other open spaces.
  - Clark County should give added consideration to open space lands where existing access facilities are appropriate for the character of the property, or where the possibility exists to provide access facilities which are appropriate for the character of the property.
  - Clark County should preserve and protect open space lands based on the location of the resource, rather than on uniform distribution throughout the county. However, in the specific case of neighborhood parks, community parks and urban open space, Clark County has existing standards, which should be used to determine distribution.
  - Where appropriate, Clark County should attempt to link open space lands into an interconnected system.
  - Clark County should generally emphasize the preservation of large contiguous blocks of open space. In certain circumstances, however, it may be appropriate to acquire smaller unconnected tracts, e.g., urban open space or the last available piece of open space of a certain category or function.
  - Clark County should attempt to preserve the natural character of areas containing threatened or endangered plant or animal habitat.
  - Clark County, when acquiring or otherwise protecting open space lands, should give special consideration to archaeological and historical resources, unique sites, and views and vistas.
  - Clark County, when acquiring open space lands of similar character, should emphasize the preservation of those lands, which are in closest proximity to the largest number of users.
  - Clark County should coordinate efforts to protect open space lands with local, state, regional and federal agencies to complement acquisition programs and maximize resource potential.
  - Clark County should consider relevant state policies and guidelines including those set forth in the Growth Management Act.
  - Clark County, in implementing its open space program, should take into consideration the economic impact and future well-being of the community.
  - Clark County should fully implement the parks and recreation element of the county's 20-Year Plan.
- 7.3.3 The Open Space Commission's additional category-specific planning objectives should guide the Planning Division in evaluating development proposals and the Parks and Recreation Department in evaluating the need and application of the open space categories identified.
- 7.3.4 The Clark County Open Space Commission Report guiding principals shall be adopted through adoption of the 20-Year Plan.

## River Systems and Associated Flood Plains

- Clark County should attempt to preserve interconnected systems of open space along its major streams, rivers and lakes. For example, acquisitions should link Salmon Creek, Burnt Bridge Creek, Lake River and Vancouver Lake.
- Clark County should attempt to connect public ownerships within river systems, so as to create extended linear greenways.
- Clark County should strive to acquire open space lands, which allow extensive public access to shoreline properties. If wildlife, wetland or other sensitive open space values would be significantly affected by public access, consideration should be given to preserving shorelines without or with limited public access.
- Clark County should consider relevant state and local policies and guidelines including those set forth in the Shorelines Management Act and the county's Shorelines Master Program.
- Clark County should give priority consideration to shorelines of statewide significance.

## Columbia River Lowlands

- Clark County should implement methods to preserve agriculture within lowland areas to preserve the overall character of this open space category.
- Clark County should cooperatively work to acquire additional open space lands and provide greater access to the Columbia River shoreline.
- Clark County should coordinate with other agencies to support the acquisition and/or proper management of sensitive wildlife habitat, water-related areas, and other open space lands; where combined funding and/or management is possible, these practices should be encouraged.
- Clark County should consider relevant regional, state and local policies and guidelines including those set forth in the Habitat Plan, the Shorelines Management Act, and the county's Shoreline Master Program.

## Regional Trails

**GOAL:**      *Develop a network of trails and bikeways throughout the county that will interconnect population centers, community facilities, work places, neighborhoods, recreational opportunities and natural greenspaces.*

### 7.4 Policies

- 7.4.1 The policies of the 1993 county-wide Trails and Bikeways System Plan shall guide the county in establishing the network of regional trails and bikeways.

## Wildlife Habitat

**GOAL:** *Preserve, conserve, restore, and enhance fish and wildlife conservation areas and open space lands and raise public awareness about the importance of these resources.*

### 7.5 Policies

- 7.5.1 The preservation of large contiguous blocks of fish and wildlife habitat shall be emphasized. In certain circumstances, however, it may be appropriate and desirable to acquire smaller disconnected areas that provide habitat needs in an urbanizing area, where opportunities are not available to connect habitat sites, or where a disconnected property serves an important habitat need.
- 7.5.2 Habitat lands should be acquired where there is a high probability of loss or conversion before acquiring habitat lands where there is a low probability of loss or conversion. This should take into consideration both actual development and property division and ownership patterns.
- 7.5.3 A full range of implementation mechanisms should be considered to preserve and protect fish and wildlife conservation areas, including transfer of development rights, conservation easements, and current use taxation programs.
- 7.5.4 Added consideration should be given to habitat lands that enhance the value of other protected abutting or neighboring parks, forests, wildlife preserves, natural areas, or other open spaces.
- 7.5.5 Recreation facilities should be located and designed in a manner that minimizes impacts to riparian areas and other sensitive habitats.



## **STRATEGIES**

This section lists three types of implementation strategies or resources for implementation that could be used: funding strategies, other county strategies, and other agency strategies. Summary descriptions of these strategies are included in the Regional Parks Plan and the Urban Parks Plan.

### **Funding Strategies**

- Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account, Public Access
- Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account, Wetland Stewardship
- Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP)
- Conservation Futures
- County Bonds
- Park Impact Fees
- Real Estate Excise Tax
- Real Estate Excise Tax - Local Conservation Areas
- Sales Tax
- Special Levy
- Interagency Committee for Outdoor Recreation
- State-Distributed Motor Vehicle Fund
- Regular Property Tax
- User Fees
- Community Development Block Grants
- Salmon Habitat Recovery Grants

### **Other County Strategies**

- Donations, Gifts, and Private Grants
- Current Use Taxation
- Density Bonuses
- Shorelines Management Program
- State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA)
- Transfer of Development Rights
- Wetlands Protection Ordinance
- Aquifer Protection Districts
- Environmental Combining District
- Flood Plain Combining District
- Lake Management Districts
- Storm and Surface Water Utilities
- Utility Local Improvement District
- Park and Recreation Service Areas
- Land Division Ordinance

## **Other Agency Strategies**

- Forest Practices - Conversion of Timber Lands
- Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area
- FmHA Conservation Easements
- Forest Legacy Program
- Land Trusts
- Public/Private Utility Corridors
- Washington State Upland Wildlife Habitat Restoration Program
- Washington State Wetlands and Riparian Initiative
- Park and Recreation District
- Metropolitan Park District
- Metropolitan Municipal Corporation
- Parks Foundation
- Hydraulic Code

Several other strategies should be considered for implementation in addition to the projects and funding sources shown in the Capital Facilities Plan.

## **CAPITAL FACILITIES PLAN**

The Parks and Recreation Department conducted a public process to identify the overall park, recreation, and open space priorities and to identify implementation strategies to accomplish the priority projects over the next six years. Criteria were developed and used to rank the projects by and between park categories.

Potential funding sources were identified from the list of implementation strategies, and matched with the priority park projects. These priority park projects were listed in tables identifying the year of project implementation. The tables representing the priority capital projects for the Vancouver-Clark Parks and Recreation Department are presented in the Supporting Documentation to the Comprehensive Plan.

## **ALTERNATIVE FUNDING SOURCES**

As the county evaluates and implements the Capital Facilities Plan, it should give consideration to additional funding sources. The following potential additional local assessments could provide funding should there be funding shortfalls.

### **Real Estate Excise Tax: Local Conservation Area**

With voter approval, the Board of County Commissioners may impose an excise tax on each sale of real property in the county at a rate not to exceed one percent of the selling price for the purpose of acquiring and maintaining conservation areas. The authorizing legislation (RCW 82.46) defines conservation areas as "land and water that has environmental, agricultural, aesthetic, cultural, scientific, historic, scenic, or low-intensity recreational value for existing and future generations." These areas include "open spaces, wetlands, marshes, aquifer recharge areas, shoreline areas, natural areas, and other lands and waters that are important to preserve flora and fauna."

### **Sales Tax: 0.2% Additional Assessment**

Within existing state statute, the county could collect an additional two-tenths of one percent sales tax. In this case, the statute provides an electoral process for repealing the tax or altering the rate. This tax is now in effect in Clark County at the rate of three-tenths of one percent. Of the three-tenths being collected, two-tenths have been assigned to law enforcement services. In addition, revenues derived from the three-tenths sales tax collected in the City of Vancouver are directed to the county in exchange for certain services; by not collecting the tax the city is also entitled to certain other state-distributed revenues.

### **Special Levy**

Washington law allows counties, along with other specified junior taxing districts, to levy additional property taxes in excess of limitations imposed by statute when authorized by the voters. Levy approval requires 60 percent majority vote at a general or special election.

### **Cooperative Partnerships**

In addition to direct funding of programs, the goals of the Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plans can be reached through cooperative partnerships with other agencies and

citizen groups. This section describes several cooperative partnerships that should be pursued by the county.

### **State and Federal Land Trades**

The state and federal governments own nearly 69,000 acres of land in Clark County, with the state Department of Natural Resource (DNR) owning 60,000 acres by itself. To better manage their lands, DNR has sought (and will likely continue to seek) to consolidate their land holdings through land trades or sales. The county should seek to work with DNR and other state and federal agencies to identify cooperative opportunities to meet county park, recreation and open space goals.

### **Storm and Surface Water Utilities**

As provided by state law, Clark County could implement a Storm and Surface Water Utility to better manage water resources. The activities of such a utility could involve protection and restoration of wetlands, ponds or other water-related areas that provide important open space and trail corridors. The county should continue to investigate the feasibility of such a utility that would support the Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plans and the goals of the county's Water Quality Division.

### **Park and Recreation Districts and Service Areas**

Where there is sufficient citizen interest, the county should explore the use of citizen managed Parks and Recreation Districts to meet their urban park needs. These districts, independently operated, could cooperatively help meet the need for urban parks, having the ability to acquire, operate and maintain parks.

### **Volunteer Programs**

The Vancouver-Clark Parks and Recreation Department should continue and build on its existing volunteer programs to provide citizen partnerships that improve the quality of county park facilities while reducing the county's financial burden. Adopt-A-Trail and Adopt-A-Greenway programs are examples of volunteer programs that have been successfully implemented elsewhere.